

Senator Harkin: A History of Making Government Work for the American People

"I have always believed that government has a role to play in standing up to powerful institutions that can forsake the interests of the American people in pursuit of their own. I see ensuring that American citizens are treated fairly and that their tax dollars are wisely spent as a core part of my job as a Senator." — Senator Tom Harkin

Senator Tom Harkin has been a champion of strong oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and that the government plays an important role in protecting consumers from practices that endanger public safety, health, and well-being. His oversight, in areas ranging from elimination of duplicative programs to exposure of fraud by companies operating for-profit colleges, has had an impact on millions of American lives. **Highlights of Harkin's work to shine a light on government waste and secrecy include:**

Conducting a Groundbreaking Investigation of Problem Ridden For-Profit College Sector:

- Between July 2010 and July 2012, Harkin conducted an in-depth oversight investigation of for-profit colleges culminating in the release of a major report in 2012, [For-Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success](#). The investigation documented that the nearly \$32 billion of taxpayer money spent annually on for-profit colleges was funding systematic industry abuses including predatory recruiting practices, fraudulent job placement claims, and millions paid in executive compensation, while more than half of students were dropping out within four months with debt but without a degree, diploma, or job. It also uncovered that for-profit schools charge students four times as much on average in tuition for the same degree offered by community colleges or other learning institutions.
- Harkin's investigation also revealed that for-profit colleges were heavily recruiting veterans in order to cash in on their Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits through the publication of an additional report, [Benefitting Whom? For-Profit Companies and the Growth of Military Educational Benefits](#). This report led to the 2012 Executive Order issued by President Barack Obama: Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.
- In 2014, Harkin released a follow-up report, [Is the New G.I. Bill Working?: For-Profit Colleges Increasing Veteran Enrollment and Federal Funds](#), which confirmed that 8 of the top 10 recipients of Post-9/11 G.I. Bill money are Wall Street owned for-profit colleges that are collecting billions of taxpayer dollars each year. Although overall student enrollment has decreased at each of the top for-profit Post-9/11 G.I. Bill beneficiaries, their enrollment of veterans has dramatically increased – up to 657 percent – during the same period.
- As a result of Harkin's oversight, many for-profit colleges have come under investigation by state and federal regulators and consumers are more aware of the potential pitfalls of attending a for-profit college.

Holding the Federal Government Accountable for Compensation to Nuclear Plant Workers in Iowa:

- In 1997, Harkin received a letter from Bob Anderson, a constituent in Burlington, Iowa, who wrote about how he and many of his former co-workers at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAP) had become ill with various types of cancer after working on a secret nuclear weapon assembly line at the plant during the Cold War. Despite the U.S. Army's initial denial that such a facility existed, Harkin continued to investigate the situation and discovered that Department of Energy workers were in fact exposed to massive doses of radiation at the plant from 1948-1974. The primitive safety measures in place at the time meant that these workers were exposed to unmonitored and excessive levels of radiation and other chemicals that led many to develop various types of cancer and other illnesses. In response, Harkin helped to pass the *Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000* to provide compensation to the many workers nationwide who had developed cancer and other diseases as a result of their work on nuclear weapons during the Cold War.
- When it became clear that it would be impossible to accurately reconstruct the radiation doses received by the Iowa workers, Harkin successfully worked to obtain automatic compensation for the IAAP workers, the first facility approved for this status. To date, the U.S. Department of Labor has paid out almost \$300 million in compensation to workers and survivors in Iowa, including both the Burlington workers and former workers at the Ames Laboratory.

Holding Federal Contractors Accountable for Worker Misconduct:

- Since 2000, Harkin has worked to ensure that companies receiving government contracts are good employers and do not have a record of misconduct.
- In 2003, Harkin ensured that taxpayer dollars do not subsidize excessive salaries of executives at firms that receive government contracts from federal health agencies by capping the federal contribution to an individual's salary at the same level of senior federal executives.
- In 2013, Harkin released [Acting Responsibly? Federal Contractors Frequently Put Workers' Lives and Livelihoods at Risk](#), a report that identified 49 separate federal contractors that had received \$81 billion in taxpayer dollars since 2012, while also violating federal worker safety and wage laws.
- In response, in July 2014, President Obama issued an Executive Order: The Fair Pay and Safe Workplace Order, adopting many of the recommendations of Harkin's report.

Preventing Waste, Fraud, and Abuse in Medicare:

- In 1997, Harkin founded the Senior Medicare Patrol program to help Medicare recipients detect, prevent, and report Medicare fraud. The program has generated over \$100 million in savings by educating and counseling over 4.7 million seniors.
- Harkin similarly initiated funding for the creation of the Medicare Fraud Strike Force, teams of accountants, inspectors, prosecutors, and police officers that work together in high-fraud areas to shut down Medicare fraud schemes. Since 2007, the Strike Force has charged more than 1,400 defendants who falsely billed more than \$4.8 billion to Medicare.
- Following the release of a Harkin commissioned report by the Government Accountability Office that identified \$23 billion in annual program losses, Harkin successfully pressed for the use of competitive bidding to purchase medical equipment. In its first two years of operation, the program has saved more than \$400 million and is estimated to save over \$40 billion for the government and Medicare beneficiaries over the next decade.

Ensuring Taxpayer's Access to Federally-Funded Research:

- Beginning in 2008, Harkin, together with Senator Arlen Specter, required the results of federally-funded research be available to the American public. Harkin successfully expanded this provision to all research programs in the fiscal year 2014 LHHS appropriations bill.

For more information, please visit Senator Harkin's website at <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.